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Unique bi-ski helps child with muscular dystrophy have fun on the slopes

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LAKE LUZERNE — Peter Frolish, who has muscular dystrophy, carves turns in the snow better than some kids with no physical challenges at all.

It's possible thanks to the world's only automated bi-ski, which Frolish uses in the Winter Adaptive Sports Program at Double H Ranch, in Lake Luzerne.

The equipment, in its second year of use, is the result of a senior engineering project by Clarkson University students.

"Peter controls the steering with a joy stick," said Ed Linville of Middle Grove, a volunteer ski instructor. "It controls the edging angle of the skis, and the speed and shape of his turns. If he moves the stick right, the ski goes on its right edge. If he moves the stick left, he turns on the left edge.

"So he will be skiing fully independent," Linville said. "That's incredible."

This is 13-year-old Peter's second year working with the custom-made device.

He is the older son of Alex and Tina Frolish of Milton. Their younger son, 12-year-old Phillip, also has muscular dystrophy.

There are many types of muscular dystrophy. Peter and Phillip both have Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a genetic "nonsense mutation" that inhibits muscle development.

On Friday, Feb. 1, Alex will be cooking up tasty dishes for a food and wine tasting event to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. The event, from 4 to 7 p.m., is scheduled for D'Andrea's Liquor Store at West Avenue and Washington Street in Saratoga Springs.

The mission of the Double H Ranch is to provide specialized programs and year-round support for children with life-threatening conditions and their families.

The ranch's winter program is held every Saturday and Sunday from January through March and is the only free privatized program of its kind in the Northeast. It gives participants an opportunity to learn a lifelong skill with equipment provided.

The 2013 season got under way this past Saturday.

With 170 volunteer instructors, the program encompasses alpine skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing lessons. Cross-country ski trails are also available.

Linville said the bi-sled is an invaluable asset for the program.

"We're still trying to perfect it," he said. "Clarkson students did the early design. We made modifications to the sled carriage to fit a motor and linkage for the motor, to turn the skis on edge."

An engineer at Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory assisted with the effort.

With help from volunteers, Peter can even get on the ski hill's main chairlift, go to the top and experience the thrill of speeding downhill as fast as he wants.

Is it fun?

The smile on his face says it all.

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